



EUCIS-LLL

DEFEND EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND 2014-2020!

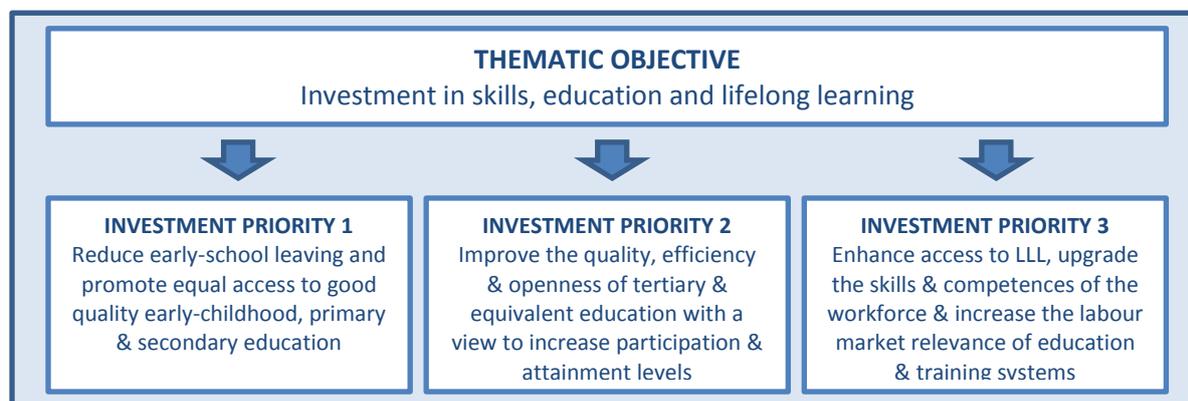
YOUR ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

The European Social Fund (ESF), a Structural Fund from the European Union, has been created at the beginning of the European construction to reduce differences in prosperity and living standards across EU regions. The ESF is very important for education and training as it financially supports thousands of projects linked to crucial stakes for the sector such as tackling early-school leaving or implementing validation systems. Today the next version 2014-2020 of the ESF is negotiated in Brussels and your government, within the Council of the European Union, will start negotiating the content and budget of the ESF with the European Parliament from this autumn (note that the ESF described below is therefore still subject to changes); each country will prepare a Partnership Contract and an Operational Programme defining their strategic orientations, to be approved by Brussels by the end of 2012 – beginning of 2013. You can act at the national level to defend the place of education and training in the next ESF. By proposing you a draft letter to send to your Ministry, some key arguments and a toolbox to feed the diverse other actions that you could initiate (campaigns, position papers), EUCIS-LLL helps you through this toolkit to secure the financing of your future educational projects.

Why the ESF is important for education and training

The European Social Fund is as old as the European Union and belongs to the **EU Structural Funds** that are financial tools set up to implement the European regional policy. For the period 2014-2020, a budget of **84 billion euros** has been proposed by the European Commission for the ESF, which represents a **singular budget increase** compared to 2007-2013 (€75bn) and 25% of the overall budget proposed for cohesion policy (supported by the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament). The funding is allocated for projects operated by a very diverse range of public and/or private sector beneficiaries (training centres, associations dealing with social inclusion, etc.) within member states and their regions.

One of the main priorities of the ESF 2007-2013 was **supporting Member States and Regions to design and implement reforms in education and training systems** in line with the European lifelong learning strategies. For the period, 42% of the total ESF budget was allocated to programmes related to lifelong learning according to an evaluation published in August 2012. The Commission's proposal on the ESF 2014-2020 keeps on following this path: the funding will be concentrated on four thematic objectives for Member States and one of them is "**Investment in skills, education and lifelong learning**" (the Parliament proposes to add "training"). More precisely, this objective has been divided into three investment priorities in line with EU guidelines:



So an important part of the next version of the European Social Fund would be dedicated to education and training and lifelong learning and this represents a unique opportunity to value your projects. An emphasis will also be put on **youth unemployment, active and healthy ageing, disadvantaged groups, gender equality and non-discrimination** – as many themes related to education and training and opportunities to broaden the spectrum of your projects. Besides, if you happen to work for inclusive education, **20% of the ESF will be earmarked for social inclusion** and the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament put a great emphasis on social actions in its report.

Moreover, the ESF 2014-2020 brings good news for civil society and social partners of the world of education as a very innovative **Partnership Approach** has been proposed by the Commission and strongly supported by the Employment and Social Affairs Committee. It means that those stakeholders will be further encouraged in the design and implementation of the ESF through capacity building for instance (even though, as we will see, **this innovation is threatened by the actual negotiations**). Besides, **access to the Fund will be made easier for small beneficiaries** such as NGOs and small-and-medium-size enterprises through simplified rules.

In a word, **the European Social Fund 2014-2020 will certainly offer new opportunities for beneficiaries in the field of education and training**. Many more stakeholders will be able to ask for funding and be associated to the management of the Fund in the next years; projects from a very broad array of sectors can be financed; and more diverse target groups will benefit from those initiatives. However, in order to make them concrete, **a certain number of points in the content and the budget of the Fund need to be secured in the next months**, during the negotiations in Brussels or the design of a Partnership Contract and Operational Programme in your own country. In the next section, we present **four aspects of the next ESF negotiations that need to be monitored by you**, the people that will benefit from the funds.

What is to defend in front of your government

In order to ensure a trans-sectorial coordination and a better systemic impact of the ESF, the rest of the cohesion policy as well as other European funds, the European Union defined in March 2012 a **Common Strategic Framework** with top priorities applicable to all funds. Then each Member State should prepare and agree with the European Commission by the end of 2012 or beginning of 2013 on a **Partnership Contract** based on this Framework to set out the national requirements to deliver those EU objectives. Those contracts contain the thematic objective and investment priorities mentioned above. A related **Operational Programme** should be also prepared by public authorities in the same period, presenting their specific development strategies for the ESF 2014-2020. The new partnership principle recommends that Member States shall design and implement the Partnership Contracts (therefore the Operational Programme) and the different stages of the ESF in partnership with stakeholders (civil society, social partners): **this is your chance to defend education and training (see the 4 points below) in front of your government**.



Valuing the lifelong learning objective

KEY DEMAND 1 - Promote a holistic vision of lifelong learning: the investment priorities encompass the main EU targets for up to 2020 (early-school leaving, tertiary attainment) but remain extremely broad. Education and training are now at the top of the political agenda for competitive knowledge societies but there are many projects to build in this sector that should not be narrowed to the adaptation of workers' skills to the labour market. Lifelong learning also comes to many other themes such as the recognition of non-formal and information education, active ageing, second chances, etc. It is important that values such as social inclusion and cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment are equally promoted with employability in the Partnership Contract and Operational Programme. Besides, there is not guarantee

that your government will privilege the education and training thematic objective compared to the three others covered by the ESF. Step up to defend lifelong learning as a priority for growth and jobs!

- 🇪🇺 **KEY DEMAND 2 - Support the focus on social inclusion:** while negotiations are on-going in Brussels, the proposed minimum share of 20% of the ESF dedicated to social inclusion seems to be backed by the Parliament's relevant Committees and the Council Presidency. This would be the opportunity for you to initiate inclusive education projects in favour of disadvantaged groups and especially the Roma population, but also many other actions in various fields such as gender equality, active ageing, etc. To make the 20% earmarking a tool for inclusive education, you can defend a broad support to all target groups at risk of educational disadvantage in the Partnership Contract and Operational Programme.

Ensuring a broad participation of stakeholders

- 🇪🇺 **KEY DEMAND 3 - Ensure a genuine Partnership Approach:** the elements proposed by the European Commission for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership provide details for this new partnership approach applicable among other funds to the ESF. However this innovative set of rules, supported by the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, may never be implemented if the Partnership Approach proposed by the Commission disappears in the negotiations. Indeed, the Regional Development Committee of the Parliament decided to privilege local and regional authorities in an exclusive partnership agreement with your government. It means that the internal battle in the Parliament may relegate civil society organisations to almost a non-existing role in the process, while this new Approach was your weapon to have your say in the design and implementation of the ESF. This is your role to step into the process, claim your right to be involved in the programme cycle and ask your public authorities how they intend to make this partnership concrete in the field of education and training.

- 🇪🇺 **KEY DEMAND 4 - Ease access to the ESF for small beneficiaries:** NGOs and SMEs belong to the small beneficiaries that represent around half of recipients of ESF funding. The ESF 2014-2020 has eased their access to the programme by simplified management rules, notably for reimbursement procedures. Yet the management of those funds remains utterly complex unless you are a specialist of EU jargon and procedures and the administrative burden is still very hard to cope with for small organisations. According to the Parliament, a technical assistance should be implemented at the national or regional level to help them decipher EU procedures; otherwise the easier access for small beneficiaries will remain a beautiful promise on the paper. You can contribute by asking for this technical assistance in your Partnership Contract or Operational Programme.

How to defend it

EUCIS-LLL invites you to send a letter to your Ministry in charge to defend the four key demands presented above. We also provide you with a toolkit with websites, key documents and a policy-making timeline in case you want to go further in your national advocacy work for the next ESF 2014-2020, with examples of how to use them in relation to the key demands.

A letter to your government

Subject: education and training need to be valued in the European Social Fund 2014-2020

Dear *[i.e. Minister for Employment]*,

In a time of negotiations in Brussels over the next cohesion policy and drafting of our Partnership Contract, *[name of your organisation]*, as a member of *[name of your network]* and a *[future]* ESF beneficiary, would like to draw your attention on the essential role of the European Social Fund in the education and training sector.

Over the period 2007-2013, the ESF has proven to be a major funder of lifelong learning across the EU with 42% of the total ESF budget allocated to corresponding programmes¹ and ...% ([see ESF financial allocations](#)) in [your country]. The ESF is indeed a key instrument to foster inclusive learning pathways at all stages of life. Therefore, we do hope the budget increase proposed by the European Commission for the ESF will be supported by this government and used advisedly to invest in lifelong learning strategies within the future Operational Programme.

We welcome the investment priorities proposed by the Commission under the thematic objective “Investment in skills, education and lifelong learning”. They reflect crucial European targets for the next decade and our Partnership Contract and Operational Programme have to take over the political will to develop our workers’ skills and overcome barriers between education and work, especially for the most vulnerable groups. Yet lifelong learning should not be narrowed to the labour market relevance of education and training. We ask you to emphasise in the Partnership Contract and Operational Programmes key values such as personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social cohesion and inclusion. The latter is especially important since 20% of the ESF will be most probably earmarked for social inclusion. We count on you to use this new focus to develop guidelines aimed at all audiences at risk of educational disadvantage.

Besides, a new partnership principle has been set up by the Commission for the Common Strategic Framework Funds (first elements of a European Code of Conduct on Partnership). This approach, supported by the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, recommends setting up partnerships at all stages of the design and implementation of the ESF with various stakeholders, in particular with social partners and civil society. However, this revolutionary Approach is now threatened in the negotiation process by the Regional Development Committee that favoured local and regional authorities in an exclusive partnership agreement with your government. As a key civil society representative in [your country], [name of your organisation] claims for its right to be informed of and fully involved in the elaboration of the Partnership Contract and related Operational Programme in the field of education and training. To make this partnership principle concrete is essential so that all ESF beneficiaries, without any discrimination, can have their say in a programme that will concern an important part of their work – especially small beneficiaries that are supposed to benefit from an easier access to the ESF for the next funding period.

We do hope our arguments will be taken into account and remain at your disposal to discuss the place of education and training in the Partnership Contract and Operational Programme. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[xxx]

¹ Evaluation of the ESF support to Lifelong Learning, Final Report, Ecorys for the European Commission (August 2012)

A toolbox

Websites

The European Social Fund: ec.europa.eu/esf

The ESF in your country: ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=45&langId=en

Your ESF managing authority: ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/manage/authority/authority_en.cfm

The ESF database (priorities, spending, beneficiaries,...): ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=440&langId=en#opt2



How to use it for KEY DEMAND 1: in Italy, over 800 million euros have been spent over the period 2007-2013 for the priority “promoting education and training throughout working life”

Indicative EU policy-making timeline

- **September 2012:** European Parliament/Council of the EU – beginning of negotiations on the ESF
- **16 October 2012:** Council of the EU (General Affairs) – Legislative deliberations on the Cohesion Policy Legislative Package
- **29-30 November 2012:** Committee of Regions - adoption of the opinion on the European Code of Conduct on Partnership
- **11 December 2012:** Council of the EU (General Affairs) – Legislative deliberations on the Cohesion Policy Legislative Package
- **End of 2012 – first trimester of 2013:** adoption by Member States of the Common Strategic Framework and ESF, agreement on the Partnership Contracts and Operational Programmes

Key documents

European Commission's proposal for the ESF 2014-2020, March 2012:

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/BlobServlet?docId=231&langId=en>

European Commission's proposal for the Common Provisions Regulation (all funds), October 2011:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0615:FIN:EN:PDF>

-  **How to use it for KEY DEMAND 3:** Article 5: *"Partnership and multi-level governance"*

European Commission Staff Working Document "The partnership principle in the implementation of the Common Strategic Framework Funds – elements for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership", April 2012:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/strategic_framework/swd_2012_106_en.pdf

-  **How to use it for KEY DEMAND 3:** Article 2.3: *"The involvement of bodies representing civil society..."*

Employment and Social Committee of the European Parliament's report for the ESF 2014-2020, April 2012:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&procnum=COD/2011/0268#documentGateway>

-  **How to use it for KEY DEMAND 1:** Amendment 49 among others: *"Reducing and preventing early school leaving and promoting equal access to good quality inclusive early-childhood development programs, primary and secondary education, and informal and non-formal learning opportunities, allowing them to rejoin education and training pathways"*
-  **How to use it for KEY DEMAND 3:** Amendment 66: *"capacity-building for stakeholders, including social partners and NGOs delivering education, lifelong learning, training [...]"*
-  **How to use it for KEY DEMAND 4:** Amendment 39: *"The involvement of local and regional authorities and of the social partners and other stakeholders, in particular NGOs, in the implementation of operational programmes [...] may take the form of technical assistance [...]"*

European Economic and Social Committee opinion on the ESF 2014-2020, February 2012:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.soc-opinions.20526>

-  **How to use it for KEY DEMAND 3:** article 1.14: *"The European code of conduct for implementing the partnership principle must clarify [...] the fact that [...] all the partners recognised by Article 5 of the proposal [...] must be guaranteed access to the different implementation phases of the funds [...] and receive sufficient financing to enable them to participate."*

Committee of the Regions opinion of the ESF 2014-2020, May 2012:

<http://coropinions.cor.europa.eu/coropiniondocument.aspx?language=en&docnr=6&year=2012>

-  **How to use it for KEY DEMAND 2:** *"The CoR approves the allocation of at least 20% of total ESF resources in each Member State to the thematic objective "promoting social inclusion and combating poverty"*

Committee of the Regions' future opinion of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (to be adopted in November 2012):

<http://cor.europa.eu/en/activities/commissions/coter/work-progress/Pages/european-code-conduct-on-partnership.aspx>

-  **To be used for KEY DEMAND 3**